IN THE CLAIMS

Please cancel Claims 1 – 11, 19 – 32, 43, 53 – 57 and 60 – 69 without prejudice, and add new Claims 70 – 97 as follows:

1. – 69. (Cancelled)

70. (New) Saddle pad apparatus adapted to support a saddle while maintaining substantially unimpeded movement of the spinal column of a living subject, comprising:

a first pad disposed laterally to one side of said spine and a second pad disposed laterally to the other side of said spine so that said first and second pads straddle said spinal column and are sufficiently distant therefrom so that said saddle pad apparatus does not impede movement of the spinal column of said living subject by forming a space between said spinal column and said saddle pad apparatus, each of said pads being adapted to individually cooperate with one or more gaps or recesses of the anatomy of the living subject;

wherein at least a portion of said one or more gaps or recesses are disposed in the withers region of the subject.

71. (New) The apparatus of Claim 70, further comprising a third and a fourth pad so that said apparatus comprises four discrete pads, two per side of the spine.

72. (New) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein at least one of said pads varies in thickness.

73. (New) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein at least a portion of said plurality of pads are formed from a visco-elastic foam material.

74. (New) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein said plurality of pads are disposed in pockets formed substantially between a first layer and a second layer of material.

75. (New) The apparatus of Claim 74, wherein said plurality of pads are made removable from said pockets via Velcro strips disposed at seams of said pockets.

76. (New) The apparatus of Claim 74, wherein said first layer and second layer comprise sheepskin and a fiber-based material, respectively, said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said living subject, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact said saddle.

77. (New) The apparatus of Claim 76, wherein said living subject comprises an equine.

78. (New) The apparatus of Claim 70, wherein said apparatus is further adapted to mitigate rocking of said saddle back and forth on said living subject during riding.

79. (New) The apparatus of Claim 72, wherein said apparatus is further adapted to mitigate rocking of said saddle back and forth on said living subject during riding based at least in part on said variation in thickness.

80. (New) Saddle pad apparatus adapted to support a saddle on a living subject, comprising:

a plurality of pads that distribute load from said saddle substantially evenly on said living subject to avoid contact with the living subject's spinal column over only a plurality of non-contiguous regions of said living subject's anatomy such that during riding said saddle is substantially stable around a rotational axis transverse to the longitudinal axis of the spinal column of said subject;

wherein said plurality of pads are disposed laterally to said spine in pockets formed substantially between a first layer and a second layer of material; and

wherein said first layer and second layer comprise sheepskin and a fiber-based material, respectively, said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said living subject, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact said saddle.

81. (New) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein said plurality comprises four discrete pads, two per side of the spine, each of said four pads being adapted to cooperate with a recess or gap within the anatomy of the subject.

82. (New) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein at least one of said pads varies in thickness.

83. (New) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein at least a portion of said plurality of pads are formed from a visco-elastic foam material.

84. (New) The apparatus of Claim 80, wherein said plurality of pads are made removable from said pockets via Velcro strips disposed at seams of said pockets.

85. (New) The apparatus of Claim 83, wherein said living subject comprises an equine.

86. (New) The apparatus of Claim 85, wherein said apparatus is further adapted to support said saddle while maintaining substantially unimpeded movement of the spinal column of said living subject.

87. (New) A saddle pad adapted for use with a saddle on an equine, comprising:

first and second substantially flexible elements having roughly the same shape, said first and second elements being bound together in at least a plurality of locations along their periphery, said first element comprising a thick sheepskin and being in direct contact with the skin of said equine; and

a plurality of compressible visco-elastic foam pad elements disposed between said first and second flexibly elements, said pad elements straddling the spine of said equine at a distance whereby said saddle pad is not in contact with the spinal column of said equine during riding,

wherein substantial weight redisposition of said saddle in a front-back direction is frustrated by said pad elements; and

wherein said unimpeded spine movement, said frustration of redisposition, and said first flexible element cooperate to provide reduced discomfort for said equine during said riding.

88. (New) The saddle pad of Claim 87, further comprising at least one peripheral ridge disposed substantially along a front or back periphery of said first and second elements, said peripheral ridge cooperating with an edge of said saddle to substantially frustrate relative motion between said saddle pad and said saddle in at least one direction during riding.

89. (New) A saddle pad adapted for use, with a saddle, on an equine, comprising:

first and second substantially flexible elements having roughly the same shape, said first and second elements being bound together in at least a plurality of locations along their periphery, said first element comprising sheepskin in direct contact with the skin of said equine and said second element comprising a fiber-based material disposed to contact said saddle;

a plurality of compressible visco-elastic foam pad elements disposed between said first and second flexible elements, a first portion of said plurality of pad elements having a first shape and an optional second portion of said plurality of said pad elements having a second shape, said pad elements adapted to straddle the spine of said equine with at least a portion of said plurality disposed within said saddle pad and sufficiently distant from said spine such that the movement of the spine of said equine is substantially unimpeded by said saddle and said pad elements during riding,

first and second restraining straps affixed to at least said second flexible element, said straps each being adapted for substantially concealed tethering to said saddle; and

at least one peripheral ridge disposed substantially along a front or back periphery of said first and second elements, said peripheral ridge cooperating with an edge of said saddle to

substantially frustrate relative motion between said saddle pad and said saddle in at least one direction during riding;

wherein said pad elements having said first shape are adapted to interface with gaps formed in the withers region of said animal, whereas said optional pad elements having said second shape are adapted to interface with gaps formed in the region of the animal directly under a rear portion of said saddle.

90. (New) Tilt-inhibiting saddle pad apparatus, comprising:

a body element having a plurality of pockets formed therein, said plurality of pockets formed substantially between a first layer and a second layer of material, said first layer comprising sheepskin disposed to contact the skin of an animal and said second layer comprising a fiber-based material being disposed to contact a saddle;

a plurality of visco-elastic foam pad elements disposed within respective ones of said pockets; and

an optional contour element adapted to be disposed within a respective one of said pockets, said optional contour element having physical properties that when used in cooperation with said pad elements and the anatomy of said animal on which said pad apparatus and a saddle are disposed, maintain said saddle in a substantially constant orientation with respect to said animal.

91. (New) A pad element comprising a plurality of substantially rounded edges adapted for use in a saddle pad, wherein said pad element is formed from a visco-elastic foam and is adapted for selective removal from said saddle pad by a user; and

wherein said pad element is particularly shaped to accommodate a particular withers region artifact on the anatomy of an animal on which said pad element and saddle pad is utilized.

92. (New) The pad element of Claim 91, wherein said pad element has a plurality of densities associated therewith in its uncompressed state.

93. (New) The pad element of Claim 92, wherein said plurality of densities are substantially stratified with respect to the width dimension of said element.

94. (New) Apparatus adapted for use on high-withered animals, comprising:

a substantially flexible pad comprising a plurality of pockets formed substantially between a first layer and a second layer of material and adapted to capture respective ones of pad elements;

wherein said first layer and second layer comprise sheepskin and a fiber-based material, respectively, said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said high-withered animals, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact a saddle;

a plurality of visco-elastic foam pad elements captured by respective ones of said pockets;

wherein said pad elements and said pad cooperatively form a raised feature element to raise a frontal portion of a saddle disposed over top of said pad elements with respect to a withers region in order to mitigate tilting or rocking of the saddle.

95. (New) The apparatus of Claim 61, further comprising a pad interface adapted to interface between said pad and said animal, said pad interface adapted to (i) dissipate localized pressure; (ii) dissipate heat; and (iii) dissipate moisture.

96. (New) A coordinated riding system for use on an animal, comprising:

a pad retaining structure comprising a plurality of pockets formed substantially between a first layer and a second layer of material and adapted to capture respective ones of pad elements, said first layer and second layer comprise sheepskin and a fiber-based material, respectively, said sheepskin being disposed to contact the skin of said high-withered animals, said fiber-based material being disposed to contact a saddle;

a plurality of visco-elastic foam pad elements that straddle the spinal column and are sufficiently distant from a spinal column of said animal so as to not impede movement thereof during animal ambulation, said plurality of pad elements being retained by said structure and adapted to provide a substantially uniform distribution of pressure and withers support; and

an interface element disposed between said animal and said pad elements, said interface element being adapted to provide substantial pressure dissipation, moisture dissipation, and thermal dissipation.

97. (New) The system of Claim 96, wherein said retaining structure comprises a saddle pad, and said pad elements comprise four visco-elastic foam pads, two of said pads being disposed at or near the withers region of said animal and configured to cooperate with gaps present in the anatomy of said animal at said withers region to provide said withers support.